drawer bib-copy

1001

Oral History with Tom Barlow
Evelyn McClure and Frank Baumgardner
July 22, 1998

(first few comments of conversation not recorded)

TB: ..... You go down the first little lane to the West, that's where the first apple sauce cannery on the west coast was.

EM: Did you jump on the train when it was a passenger train or freight?

TB: They had passenger cars with old hard wooden seats

EM: Up to what time?

TB: Gosh I don't know before I ever.. we moved into Sebastopol...I was born in 1925 and I rode on the train several times, I was quite young. We would get on at Barlow Station and go but I never. We moved into town when I was 10. I don't believe I rode the passenger train but at one time they told me they had 2,000 rail cars about in the early 20's, of apples out of here, and they would load them right up here, what's up there now? at the parking across from the pizza parlor (Burnett St./the P&SR Depot)

EM: Right where the Depot was?

TB: Yeah, that's the depot. And they had double tracks in there where they would unload the tar and gasoline until they got told to leave and they came down here right at my door, the foot of McKinley and unloaded all the road tar, some gas, some fuels, like for lanterns and lights. Then we had Standard Oil and Union Oil come in and they would unload at their dock. But when I moved down here in 1947 there was a big hole and it was just chuck full like the La Brea tar pits and in those days you didn't think much about it. I filled it all in with rock and everything. And we're still cleaning up.

EM: This was on your property and they threw all this oil and stuff in there?

TB: It should have gone back to the railroad but the railroad is gone, defunct, gone. So they next salmon they had was me. But we're 90% cleaned up and Sacramento said as far we're concerned let nature take its course.. Sonoma County said no, we want it cleaned up 100%. So we're going ahead with that.

EM: Everybody is paranoid about this toxic stuff now.

TB: It all comes from the ground but they don't want it to go back to the ground.

08-048

EM: What a terrible legacy these companies left.

TB: We'll get it cleaned up. So.

Frank: well let me go ahead and just read questions to you. . .
Given the fact that a light rail system would cost $2 million or more a mile to construct, do you think its simply better to keep to the old system? Or should we do more transit?

TB: What is the old system? Automobiles?

E: Freeway

TB: I'll tell you this, I have always said don't miss a bet buy up all those right of ways and we'll pay for them over a period of time cause so many people like to walk, hike and things like that. You're gonna lose some right of ways we should have like from Forestville on to Santa Rosa to Petaluma and if they want to go further that's another ball game. There's some nice places in between, there's some junk but they would have the right to use the right of way. I think we should have them.

E: Hasn't the County done that pretty well with the P&SR right of way, to make it a trail?

TB: There are spurts and parts of it but I don't know that we have a continuous trail all the way through.

E: There're heading that way but not moving very fast.

TB: Well its all money. I don't think people would be against that. Yes, a lite rail system, like passenger, if you're talking about that and maybe mail, would be a very fine investment. I wouldn't make it too large cause as things change you're going to have heavier and faster cars come in.

F: Well I was thinking just the 101 corridor. Going to Marin County and back.

TB: You mean down to meet the boats?

F: Yes, and more boats too.

TB: They're making pretty good progress with those boats.
As long as they can shut them off when they go in.

F: Let me go back to the beginning. In what year were you born.

TB: 1925

F: What elementary school did you attend?

TB: The old wooden one. When I started out my father was the head of the board of trustees when they built the new one.

F: Did you go to Analy?

T: Yes.

F: What year did you graduate?

T: 1943. I was in the Army in 1944 and 45

F: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

T: One sister

E: We should get you to tell us your parent's names (for the record)

T: Gracie Meeker was my mother. Thomas Denman Barlow (father)

E: And maybe your grandparents too, because your family has been here so long.

T: Steve Meeker and Estelle Litchfield (Maternal grandparents)

E: On your father's side, the grandparents?

T: Miller from Two Rock, they're all buried at Two Rock. With some of the Barlows.

F: Yeah the Miller's are mentioned in the history written by Margaret Paull, history of Two Rock.

T: They tell me the story that Jim Miller came across the Sierra at the time of the gold strike and he got off his horse, started to pan for gold, and he hit a glory hole worth $60,000. Came down and bought all that land around Bloomfield and Effie Miller, she killed him (not literally) and she married another fellow with a lot of land and she killed him.

E: Usually the women died because they're worn out from work and bearing children.

T: I exaggerate. Her husbands passed away early in life. Then her daughter, Vivian, married Lagomarsino who had an awful lot of land and he died and they were so land poor. They owned all this stuff through here down the laguna. Anyway she's gone, her daughter's still alive. I see her once in a great while. She says hello cousin. I don't know all my relatives, I've got so many of them.

TB: They used to have big family get togethers. There are so many different names now, I had one call the other day about the graves in Santa Rosa, needing cleaning up and a contribution. He was handling it.

F: This is a question that is under debate because I talked to one man who said there was no lumber carried on the P&SR and someone else said he did remember lumber.

T: Are you talking about lumber or logs? They would bring them down out of the hills, like at Cazadero and Occidental and get them on a flat car and where they'd take them, I don't know what mill it would have been. But they did haul some logs because I've seen pictures. I just asked my daughter, I had pictures, I thought I had pictures of one of the electric cars and my grandfather Meeker was a conductor on the narrow gauge for some years through Camp Meeker. There's Effie Meeker, and that crowd were first cousins to my Meeker grandfather. And he was out in that area quite a bit. I think the railroad had a lot to do with the land they farmed towards the coast. The narrow gauge was the one that hauled the potatoes and I guess wheat. I don't imagine they carried big loads (of lumber) but they carried some.

F: I think the narrow gauge was built originally for that (lumber hauling)

(tape cuts in and out)

T: You can go out to Valley Ford and Tomales and you can see the runs. They tell me just before you go into Tomales they had to go through that hill, the big tunnel, it goes right up to it and comes out the other end, they must have dug a hole. I often thought I should take a metal detector and find how many gold coins fell from the train.

F: Do you have any first impressions of the railway, riding on it?

T: Not on the narrow gauge. Yes on the electric I remember a couple trips. I also worked on a railroad when I was in high school. Boy was it cold in the morning. I had several trips, we'd get on at Barlow Station and go and come back.

E: What was your job on the railroad?

T: Pounding spikes and putting in ties.

E: Like a maintenance crew?

T: Every weekend. With a couple other young fellows too. We raised hell and had a good time.

F: Jim Nagy mentioned, he had a story, just for a joke they put their lighted cigarettes out, toss them in the foreman's hat.

T; We had a foreman that was hard to understand for a young fellow and we did give him a hard time.

E: Jim was on that crew too?

T: Jim and George Nagy and Tom Klinker and Ralph Mayhorn.

F: There was a Mayhorn mentioned by Mr. Yaeger (spelling?) that was a conductor.

E: Was that Albert?

T: Yeah, he had a son Albert too. They went back to the Pennsylvania coal mines. But he was a gardener most of the time I ever knew him. But he'd go abalone-ing and take us along. Ed Butts, the physical ed and math teacher in grammar school. Was a naturalist, taught us flowers and things like that, butterflies.

F: They had wooden seats on the train ?

T: Sure did and they were hard too.

F: Do you remember how many, was there a motorman and a conductor or was there just one man.

T: I really can't tell you. There was the electrical thing and you'd touch that and away you'd go. It towed something behind it and then you had a couple of passenger cars, sometimes one or two. We had a packing house right along there that I grew up with and they'd come by but mostly then it was boxcars.

E: Did everyone have to take their freight to the railroad, there never was a track that came here to Barlow Co.?

T: No, Barlow Station, we loaded there. At the corner of the highway was the old co-op packing deal, my grandmother was a head of it for awhile, my father built them a cannery, SAGU. They loaded box cars right there at the place. It went right through the middle of it. I think you can still see railroad tracks. You know how it came out and down to Analy and to Main St. This one here that was right along through here. They would go down a flying dutchman swit ch. It would go up to Speas and clear on down where Union Oil had their unloading place and come back up here. There were double tracks. We had a siding to come into this place where they unload the gas and oil. They'd go down and let the car go. I guess they'd come up and get the car going fast enough that it could go off on the siding, the car would .... I can remember them doing it but can't figure it out today. The flying dutchman and they do this all the time.

F: One questions a lot of us have been wondering about...do you think the impact. What was the impact of the P&SR on agriculture?
Did most of the growers use theP&SR or did they have their own ways of getting (products) to market?

T: Up until the time that trucks became trucks, the railroad was the only way to ship it out of here. Then they had ice cars, we'd ice them. But once trucks got over the point they could get into LA and get out through the desert, they started to branch out and more trucks were being used. Bigger trucks, I remember we'd send vinegar from the old place into Los Angeles. Vinegar stock in a wooden tank that held about 1,500 to 2,000 gallons. Had a heck of a time getting over the "grapevine" (highway 101 near LA) once we got over that we were home free. But it was small amounts, the trucks didn't have the power to haul big loads like they do today. Now we ship back East, we chill the juice, bulk, to 34-36 degrees and with the fancy trailers they have they're gonna pack close to 6,000 gallons and they might lose 2 degrees in two days if its hot. Some maybe 1 degree going back. It didn't hurt us that much when the railroad quit. But it was a loss to some extent locally.

F: Was the depot kind of a social center? Did you run into people you didn't know?

T: No you pretty well knew the guys on the train. They were thieves. I've had lumber stacked out there and apples and they'd stop and start loading the lumber. I'd have to go and almost get into a fight with them to put it back. They'd take apples. Course the highway patrol does that, no problem.

F: Do you think when the rails came in, when the electric system was installed. Do you think that effected downtown Sebastopol?

T: I don't know when it was installed. I wasn't there yet (1904)

F: Did your parents talk about it?

T: As far as I can remember my mother always had a car. It was a model T, 2 door sedan. I don't remember my mother riding the train so much as my father and my grandmother. By the time I knew what I was doing they had automobiles. I remember learning to drive with a 3 wheel model T truck.

E/F: 3 wheel?

T: You had your clutch and brake and ...something

F: Mr. Nagy mentioned that he remembers there were some canneries, 4 or 6, and Mr. Trigeiro mentioned this too, in Sebastopol?

T: Sebastopol Co-op, Barlow was the first once in Sebastopol., Sebastopol Co-op came in later. SAGU then came in, Oscar Hallberg I guess was the second one in Graton, he came in and the war was on, he couldn't get tins so he gave his allotment to my parents. Then at the end of the war when things loosened up then he went in big time. You also had SAGU started, Sebastopol Apple Growers, Oehlman (Manzana). The other one was started by some coop boys not happy with SAGU or Seb. Coop. and they started one out at .. it went broke, they started an old dryer, towards Manzana from Graton on the railroad track. (can't think of the name) So that's as many canneries, we had a lot of dryers.

E: I forgot about that, canneries couldn't get tins to can apples. But there was still the possiblity of drying especially for military use. Did Barlow ever do dried fruit commercially?

T: And frozen. That's what I started. They gave me the dryer when I was 16, and I dried that year with all my girlfriends out of highschool, which was fun. At 17 I did that.

E: And you sold the products commercially?

T: They sold it, I ran the dryer, dried the apples and got half the money. But I went in the Army so I didn't get a chance to spend it until I got back. It was a dryer that was pretty modern for its time. It had a airplane propeller that sucked the heat through the things and they were all on moveable dollies instead of tray drier.

E: Were there crews of people who went around building these dryers or did individuals who wanted them build there own?

T: Well there were alot of little bitty ones before that. Lot of the bigger growers would put up small ones, like one kiln. You go down Occidental Hy. look to the right, just before you pass where the railroad goes across there's an old cement deal there, that was one of those one (?) driers. You had one right up here on Bodega Hy. past Watertrough Rd. I think they just torn the final thing down. It sat there for years. If you went on Watertrough and turned right on Barnett Valley, Kukuchi, had an old dryer. Furusho Bros. had an old drier. Maybe one kiln, two at the most. The bigger driers came later, like Pleasant Hill.

E: How big was the biggest one? You talk about a Kiln, that's the fire box that supplies the heat?

T: I don't know, they hired my father to come out to Graton and build that one that was out of red blocks across from Hallberg. That was a big size drier. If you took a right turn at Occidental Hy. and went down a hill and there was a Japanese drier there. I used to go and pick up their peels and cores. That's how we made vinegar and dump it into a dump truck and haul it back to the pit and they would squeeze it. You had another

one on Frei Rd. We go those peels and cores. And out by Darrell Hurst. There was another little dryer inthe orchard. There were a lot of little ones. In fact out at Bloomfield, there was a little dryer there, i don't know where the apples came from (for that one).

F: Do you remember a granary in Bloomfield?

T: No I don't remember it but I would assume with all the grain they raised along with the potatoes I would assume they had some storage of some sort. Bloomfield was quite a rousing little town at one time. But its turned into dairy. All the topsoil got washed off, they went on the hills and plowed em and disked em.

E: When you're making vinegar don't you have to have something called a "mother."?

T: Vinegar makes mother. You have to have a bacteria. I remember we had a young lady came up from the University of CA, Dr. Cruz, who I call the father of applesauce on the west coast. Cause he helped my father start the first cannery at Barlow Lane. And he did an awful lot ofwork here. He was a wonderful man. Theresa Statman was her name and she developed, we were making vinegar, but it would take a week or two. She developed a strain of bacteria that you could do it in a couple days. It was a great advantage for us then everybody else found out about it.

E; Where was the source of bacteria.

T: She developed a special strain. She developed quite a few strains before she hit it. She was up here I guess 2 years at her off time from the University and she'd be up here 2-3 months at a time.

E: Do you have to innoculate, so to speak, each batch.?

T: You start it, we would go to the valley and pick up corn cobs for the area for the bacteria to work. Some people would use square pieces of wood. They'd take the corn off the cob, dried then we'd bring the corn cobs and it would give us more area for bacteria to work, so we'd trickle the juice through, you maintain a constant temperature. If the electricity went off you're dead. You'd have to start again.

E: Did it have to be cold.?

T: No about 65 to 70 degrees. But they don't make anything anymore. Hunt had a vinegar plant in Graton. Manzana still makes vinegar, I think they're the only one left.

E: I took a tour with Jim Nagy of their plant and they were pressing these peelings for vinegar.

F: Did the railroad, the fact that they had regular service to San Francisco, did that pretty much improve business in terms of, did it, do you think more people moved up here and started growing things.?

T: I don't know. S& W used to come in, my grandmother would tell me, and buy up dried apples and buy berries. A fellow named Goldstein, in fact, as a kid I dealt with him. You had Rosenberg and S&W and you had, (names I can't remember) that would buy. I remember them telling me in WWI, the dried apples went up to 21 cents a pound they thought they could get 23 or 24 and the war stopped and the price immediately went to 5 cents a pound. They really lost their backside being a little greedy. But there were lots of buyers for the berries and cherries, pears. Hops, they shipped great big bags of hops out for beer. And you had the Grace Bros. in Santa Rosa bought local hops. That's all gone.

E: Did you ever get involved in picking hops?

T: Only once, I broke out.

E: Allergic, kind of a nasty thing isn't it?

T: My wife used to pick hops.

F: Was there any, do you remember, I know Earl Carrillo talks about going into Santa Rosa sometimes and he would ride the train until the end of the road, I don't know what he did then.

T: Well that was your big town, that and Petaluma.

F: Did you ever go to San Francisco on one of the riverboats.

T: No never did. Went down the first year the Golden Gate Bridge was up. My mother made me sit and watch Gone With the Wind. How boring that was?

F: Do you remember groups of India Indians. He remembers them.

T: No, they probably were here but I don't remember. American Indians were in the flat where I grew up. When I was 9, we'd go down to the flat and go swiming in Atascadero Creek. There were frames of willow. Indians came from Lake County, that was one of their stops before they went to Bodega or Dillon (Beach) and they would put fresh willow over it and came there and trade their obsidian from Lake County for shells from the ocean. And they made wampum from clam shells, the used abalone shells in their dress deals. They came through several times. The other entrance was to go to Bloomfield. There's a little pass there that you can go, where they had a rock quarry. If you're familiar with the place. As far as I know, we had a house at Dillon's Beach, or my grandmother did. We spent a lot of time out there. One day I went through the sand dunes and

here was a piece of a bow sticking out of the sand, I dug in and evidently it was a burial ground, I found a bow, quiver and a skull. I took the skull up and my father gave me a kick in the head and told me to take it back and bury it again.

E: Did they hunt and fish, they made great migrations.?

T: Sure, they hunted and fished, there were lots of deer down in our valley, where Miller's dairy was, we were right next too it, over to the hopyard. And the Marshall ranch it was called. I lived there til I was 9.

F: I have one more question. Do you remember if there were any of the canneries operated by Japanese Americans. After or before WWII.?

T: Not a cannery, driers. You had Tom? S....? and Joe Perry and those guys, Hotle, I can't remember. were the directors of a cannery out there. There were some Japanese growers but I don't think they ever had much to say about it (a cannery) Hallberg, Oehlman, Barlow, this one down here. George Heintz was the manager here.

F: Another thought, Mr. Nagy mentioned there was a bar in Sebastopol that . . . T: He would know all about that. F: a bar that was near theAnaly Hotel. He remembered the kids would go in there and they'd have milkshakes and meanwhile the guys in the back /another room were having drinks

T: Playing cards. That's Moran's Bar. They had good milkshakes there. The bar was right here and there was a room back here with snooker, pool. Then you couldn't see them but they were playing cards there. Some of the leaders in town would do that, relax with a few drinks.

E: Does that building still exist, where was it?

T: It's where the walk through now next to the old Bank of America

E: By Jasper O'Farrell?

T: In between, it went through to the lawyers office, the walk way the back end of the bank and his office. We could go in and play pool, they wouldn't through you out. But I don't remember them serving any kids. Chet Moran was a very reliable bartender, he was honest. But he sure made a good milkshake.

E: Do you want to tell us something about your war experiences? You went off to the Army? WWII Where were you stationed?

T: Camp Finn? , Tyler, Texas was where I had basic training.
They sent me to, we got on the boat, stopped on the African coast. Then they didn't have enough for us to do there. They shipped me into Italy

where things started to happen there. They had me in the Texas 36th Division, homeguard, that division was a tried and true division, along with the 3rd and 45th and 1st. So we horsed around in Italy and made the invasion of southern France and we up through there in the southern part of Alsace and Switzerland.

E: You were in an infantry unit? With a Texas unit, were there many people from Texas or from all over the U.S.?

T: They'd been replaced 500% in that division.

E: Oh, they saw a lot of action. When were you able to come back home, when were you done with your service?

T: I was fortunate, I was in a position, it wasn't that good but you made a lot of points fast. In 16 months I was eligible to come home. I got home in about 18 months. Some of the boys had been there 3 years. Never had enough points yet.

E: Did you get married after the war?

T: To my number one trimmer. We went to high school together. She's 3 years younger than I. But I raised her right.

E: What's your wife's name?

T: Donna Jacobs. Her father was a teacher, her mother was a teacher. And he went to work for the soil conservation here. They had the old CCC camp out there with boys. They planted all of that grass at Bodega Bay.

E: I've heard about that effort.

T: The sand was going to take over the bay and probably the town too. They got to planting that stuff and it worked out fine.
Then he went to Napa and started raising grass seed and sold out, came over. He was a WWI man and I didn't know but we inquired about a loan and by gosh they gave him one. And he bought the ranch next to mine. He passed away. The kids split the ranch and sold it otherwise it would have been on the end of ours. We're on Cherry Ridge. Beautiful view. Its liveable.

end of tape.